

The Oradour-sur-Glane Massacre

WARNING: This is a synopsis of the story according to the SS.

On 10 June 1944, **two platoons** of soldiers in the **3rd company** of **Der Führer regiment** [SS PzGrenRgt 4 Der Führer] of **Das Reich division** in the Waffen-SS army, **under the command of Captain** [SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Hstf] **Otto Kahn** and accompanied by **Battalion Commander** [SS-Sturmbannführer, SS-Stubaf] **Adolf Diekmann**, went to the village of **Oradour-sur-Glane** for the express purpose of searching for another battalion commander, Major [SS-Stubaf] **Helmut Kämpfe**, a beloved officer and a close personal friend of Diekmann, who was missing. It was known that Kämpfe's car had been ambushed and that he had been kidnapped by members of the **Maquis, who were part of the FTP, a French Communist resistance organization**, commanded by **Georges Guingouin**. It was believed that the **Maquis was planning to ceremoniously execute Kämpfe** that very day.

Diekmann had received information that morning from two collaborators in the French Milice (secret police)¹, who told him that Kämpfe was being held prisoner in Oradour-sur-Glane and that the Maquisards, as the resistance fighters were called, were planning to burn Kämpfe alive. This information was confirmed by German intelligence reports.

Another SS officer, named **Karl Gerlach** [SS-Ostuf, iz Kämpfeove bojne], had been **kidnapped the day before** by the **Maquis** and taken to **Oradour-sur-Glane**, after he had offered to give information to their leader in exchange for his life. **In the village, Gerlach saw members of the Maquis**, including women who were dressed in leather jackets and wearing steel helmets, the clothing of Resistance fighters. **He escaped**, wearing nothing but his underwear, just as they were preparing to execute him. He **gave this information to Diekmann** and showed him the location of Oradour-sur-Glane on a map.

Also on the day before, in the nearby town of **Tulle**, **73 SS soldiers** had been **murdered** by the Maquisards **after they had surrendered**, and **their bodies** had

¹ *French Milice [Milice française] wasn't Secret Police, but French Integral Nationalist (extreme right-wing nationalist) paramilitary organisation, formed in July 1941 as SOL [Service d'ordre légionnaire] by Joseph Darnard (19 March 1897 – 10 October 1945), many time decorated French combat veteran in both France-German wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1940). SOL was loyal to Anti-Republican, National-Conservative French State (vulgo: Vichy France). Because of SOL's „nationalist, Anti-German attitude“ Germans haven't allowed their armament. After Allied Operation «Torch» and German occupation of French State, SOL reorganised itself on 5 January 1943 into Milice française with Petain and Laval support. In October 1943 was formed first French Waffen-SS unit [Französisches SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Regiment] and French Militia as paramilitary, hardcore Anti-Communist and Anti-Semit organisation was logical group for «New Frenchmen», regardless their anti-Germanism. Year(s)1943/1944 made French extreme right-wing nationalists to get alone with Reich against Bolsheviks and Allies who fought against legal and legitimate French authorities. Marshall Petain was last French prime minister in Third Republic, lawfully appointed on 16 June 1940; „to save what can save“. Many Frenchmen were against a new Great War in which they have much greater losses than UK. Especially after Royal Navy attack in 3 July 1940 against part of French Fleet in their port near Oran (Mers-e-Qebir), Anglophobia rised among Frenchmen, including fact that Charles de Gaulle was just one anonymous French general without any right to govern, while Petain, National Hero from WW1, was legal and legitimate prime minister who formally saved large part of France from German occupation, French territories in North Africa and Indochina (agreement with Japan).*

been horribly mutilated beyond recognition. Genitals had been cut off and stuffed into their mouths. Some of the soldiers had been run over by trucks while they were still alive. An SS soldier had been dragged by his heels, face down, behind a vehicle until he was dead. Female resistance fighters had thrown excrement on the bodies of the SS soldiers. These were German soldiers who had surrendered in good faith to the Maquis, but had not been treated according to the rules of warfare under the 1929 Geneva Convention.

After the Allied invasion at Normandy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower had unilaterally informed the German army that the French resistance fighters were to be regarded as legal combatants under the protection of the Geneva Convention, but the partisans in Tulle were not honoring the Convention.

Just outside the southern entrance to Oradour-sur-Glane in the tiny hamlet of La Ferme de l'Etang, the SS soldiers came upon the horrible scene of a recent ambush of a German Army ambulance. Four wounded German soldiers had been burned alive inside the ambulance; the driver and another soldier in the passenger seat had been chained to the steering wheel and burned alive.

Before entering the village, the SS rounded up all the residents of the farming hamlets near the southern entrance of the village, where the ambulance was found, and took them in trucks to Oradour-sur-Glane, including family members of Madame Marguerite Rouffanche.

Madame Rouffanche, who lived in the hamlet of La Ferme de l'Etang, miraculously survived the massacre by jumping out of a window in the church; she testified under oath that the SS soldiers had set off a smoke bomb in the church in an attempt to asphyxiate the women and children, and had then set fire to the church, burning some of the women and children alive.

As they entered the village, the SS soldiers encountered resistance from the partisans. One SS soldier was killed and another was wounded. After closing off all the access roads and surrounding the village, Diekmann ordered the SS soldiers to round up everyone in the village and bring them to an assembly point on the village green, called the Fairgrounds. The population of the village was only 330 people but there was an equal number of refugees hiding there, including 26 "Red Spaniards" who were Communist veterans of the Spanish Civil War.

When everyone had been assembled, Diekmann explained to the mayor of the village that they were looking for weapons and also for the missing Kämpfe. Diekmann asked for hostages and the mayor offered himself and his four sons, but the offer was declined and the hostage request was dropped. The assembled villagers were asked to volunteer any information about weapons stored in Oradour-sur-Glane. Getting a negative response, Diekmann ordered the village to be searched.

The women and children were separated from the men and taken to the local church for their own safety while the town was searched for weapons and ammunition. The bodies of a number of German soldiers were discovered during

the search, along with weapons and ammunition in almost every house. The SS later learned that the village had been the weapons and ammunition supply point for the whole Dordogne area, which was the center of the Communist resistance movement.

While the search was being conducted, the men were held in six buildings, guarded by soldiers with machine-guns. At 4 p.m. a loud explosion was heard. The soldiers thought that they were being attacked by partisans hiding in the village and the execution of the 190 men in the six buildings began, all at the same time. At 5 p.m. the destruction of the whole village began, as all the buildings were set on fire, starting at the north end.

At 4 p.m. one or two of the partisans in the village, probably not Frenchmen, had entered the crowded church, located at the south end of the village, where the women and children were being held, and had set off a gas bomb. The partisans in the French resistance movement included **Polish guerrilla fighters in the Polish Home Army and escaped Russian POWs. Their intention had been to kill the women and children by asphyxiation and blame the German army** for this terrible atrocity. **This would provide motivation for more people to join the French Resistance movement.** In fact, two of the survivors, Andre Desourteaux and Robert Hebras, did join the Maquis three weeks later.

Then a bomb exploded in the tower of the church, causing the bronze bells to melt. A woman who was hiding in a house near the church said that she had heard "detonation after detonation" in the church. What she heard was grenades and ammunition, that had been stored in the church, going off after a fire started in the church, wounding the women in the legs and killing the children and babies. **SS soldiers risked their lives to enter the smoke-filled church in an attempt to rescue the women, but only a few could be saved. Years later, several women from the village told a visiting German army officer, Eberhard Matthes, that they had been rescued by SS men that day.**

Diekmann returned to his headquarters and made a report. His commanding officer, Sylvester Stadler, was angry because Diekmann had not followed orders to take hostages, that could have been used in further negotiations to free Kämpfe, who had not yet been found. Diekmann had seen enough in the village to cause him to presume that Kämpfe was already dead, so he had ordered the town to be destroyed in a reprisal action, which he had the authority to do under the Sperrle Order.

The SS later intercepted a message sent by the Maquis in which the leaders ordered the Maquisards to stop fighting in the area of Oradour-sur-Glane. Das Reich division was finally able to get to Normandy in 17 days, instead of the 3 days it would have taken without the interference of the French Resistance, which was fighting illegally in violation of the 1929 Geneva convention and in violation of the Armistice signed between Germany and France in 1940. A reprisal action for the purpose of discouraging illegal partisan activity was legal under the 1929 Geneva Convention.

During an inquest which was conducted by the SS, Diekmann testified that the bodies of a number of executed German soldiers had been found in Oradour-sur-Glane. At the Nuremberg war crimes trial after the war, SS soldiers testified that the bodies of dead German soldiers had been found in Oradour-sur-Glane. Diekmann was court-martialled for exceeding his orders, but he was never brought to trial because he was killed in action at Normandy. His fellow officers believed that he had committed suicide by deliberately getting himself killed.